

“PROFOUND EQUITIES WITH YEMEN IN TERMS OF COUNTER-TERRORISM” JUSTIFY CHILD SOLDIERS?

As the prosecutors in Omar Khadr’s sentencing hearing try to undercut the testimony of a defense witness who believes Khadr can be rehabilitated, not least because of his age, an anonymous White House official justifies to Josh Rogin Obama’s decision to undercut a law prohibiting the government from funding countries that use child soldiers.

As I suspected, the Administration rationale for exempting Yemen from sanction explicitly has to do with our counter-terrorism efforts there.

Yemen is a recipient of significant direct U.S. military assistance, having received \$155 million in fiscal 2010 with a possible \$1.2 billion coming over the next five years. Yemen is also a much needed ally for counterterrorism operations. The government is engaged in a bloody fight with al Qaeda (among other separatist and terrorist groups), and estimates put the ratio of child soldiers among all the groups there at more than half. Nevertheless, “the president believes there are profound equities with Yemen in terms of counterterrorism that we need to continue to work on,” the official told *The Cable*.

It’s bad enough that our assistance in Yemen will contribute to a war in which half the soldiers are boys.

But I really am saddened by the coincidence in this timing. At this very moment, we’re going to

great lengths in Gitmo to villainize Khadr, at least partly to dismiss all the criticism about trying a child soldier (for a crime that is not a crime). It's as if those involved are trying to convince themselves that their war on terror trumps international norms of decency.

And even as we're doing that, the President is taking affirmative steps to make it more likely that another boy, like Khadr, will be put in the same situation as him, attacked for following the orders of the adults around him.